

The Keys to Branding Your Company, Product or Service

by Jay Lipe

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, a rancher would mark his cattle with a unique brand. This brand, which offered an image unique to his ranch, would distinguish his cattle from another ranch's in the event of a broken fence.

Branding, in today's modern marketing world, operates much the same way. These days, branding is used to distinguish a product or service by establishing certain images in the prospect's mind, and in today's noisy market, it's a key marketing tool. Without it, your marketing effort as a whole rests not on a solid foundation, but on the shifting sands of an ever-changing market.

Branding the company

For most companies out there, elements of its brand are the first things a prospect sees. Whether the prospect visits a website, picks up a brochure at a conference or visits a company's trade shows booth, the prospect walks away with an impression of the brand.

My advice to most companies is to pay dear attention to their company-branding program from the outset. Remember that one objective of your marketing program should be to strengthen the 'link of trust' between you and your prospect. Branding is one of the most effective ways to do this.

Shaping your brand image

When developing a branding strategy, consider first the personality you want your brand to convey. Is it sexy or sweet? Tough or tender? Laid-back or cutthroat? These are just a few of the brand characteristics that go into a brand

image. And if you think all this is hoey, play along with me for a second and consider these questions: Do Marlboros really taste different than other cigarettes? Is AOL really better than Yahoo? Is H&R Block superior to the tax accountant down the street? No to all three!

These products are leaders because they're leading brands. The core product or service is of secondary importance to many consumers. Instead, people want to do business with a product they identify with and trust—and that gets back to the brand image.

What do you want *your company's* brand image to be? If you have trouble with that question, try equating your brand to a famous person. Do you want it to be John Wayne? Jimmy Stewart? George Clooney? Wesley Snipes? Sylvester Stallone?

Do you want it to be more like Helen Hayes? Audrey Hepburn? Madonna? Lil Kim? Shirley Temple? Choosing a celebrity can help you zero in on your brand's characteristics. For example, if you seek a brand personality that's sweet, kind and gentle, it's probably like Helen Hayes. If it's tough, strong and proud you're after, it's probably John Wayne.

Once you've chosen a complimentary personality, identify which characteristics moved you to associate your company's image with that person. Once you've identified these characteristics, they'll form the basis for your brand image.

Name: A crucial first step

How different would you be if your name was Clem or Matilda? A company or product name sets the tone for future marketing efforts. If the name is well crafted, your marketing messages carry much more impact.

Names can be generated from invented words (Xerox), initials (IBM), founder's names (Johnson & Johnson), and several other ways. Make sure your name is distinctive and memorable, it crafts the right image and it can be protected.

According to the book *Crafting the Perfect Name*, the following chart gives you an idea of the popularity of name lengths—by number of words:

Two words:	9%
Three Words	50%
Four Words	35%
Five or more words	6%

Some Qualities behind a Good Name

Whether we're talking about company, product or service names, a good name should:

- Promote the desired image.
- Communicate a benefit.
- Be easy to read, spell and pronounce.
- Be memorable.
- Be protectable.
- Provide room for growth (e.g. Aldrich Street Cleaners might be a problem if it ever moved away from Aldrich St.).
- Be easy to find when listed in a directory or phone book (e.g. where do you look for 2 Close for Comfort?)

Ways of choosing a name

Here are some of the more common ways to develop a product or company name:

1. Benefit Oriented Names

Examples: U-Haul, Emerge Marketing

I most often recommend using a benefit orientation in your name. Whether it's a company name or product name, a benefit approach singles out a key benefit to the consumer. Here are three examples of company names with benefit orientations: Sprint®, UHaul® and Budget Car Rental®. It's not hard to envision what each brand purportedly stands for, is it? OK now here are three of their competitors: Eschelonsm Telecom, Koch National Lease® and Americar®. What do *they* stand for? Don't ask me, because I don't know.

The benefit approach to naming can help you achieve more of the naming qualities above than any other method. Use it if you can.

2. **Invented Names**

Examples: Intel, Exxon, Compaq

These names don't actually mean anything. But they are easier to protect legally and I guess that explains their growing popularity. A name by this method will be distinctive, but how memorable will it be? And although one of these will be easier to protect legally, will it promote the desired image?

Like most things, this method is a trade-off, but just make sure your name is strong enough to overcome the inherent weaknesses in using this approach.

3. **Combination Names**

In the book *Crafting the Perfect Name*, the authors outline a simple process for generating a company name. First, they divide the name up into 3 sections; the *distinctive* part of the name (Who), the primary *activity* of the company (What) and the *type* of organization (How).

Then, they suggest brainstorming various word options for each section. Using a fictitious example, your options table might look like this:

Distinctive Name (Who)	Activity (What)	Type of Organization (How)
Aldrich Dunleavy Aplomb Keynote Success Reach	Marketing Research Real Estate Payroll Processing Software Knowledge	Company Associates Corporation International Partners Group

Now using this grid, you would choose the best word option in each section and combine those into a company name. For example, in the above example, I've generated *Keynote Software Partners* as a possible company name.

4. Founder's Names

Examples: Johnson & Johnson, Hewlett-Packard

Before I start here, remember that our business world is quite different than it was only 30 years ago. In those days, you could name your company Hewlett-Packard and stand a chance of breaking through the clutter. Today, I don't think you can. There are too many messages clamoring for people's attention these days. Hewlett Window Repair or Packard Lawn Service will just get lost.

There are a couple caveats to this. If you have a distinctive name, that is easy to pronounce and spell, then it might make sense. Also, if you're a famous personality with equity already built into your name (e.g. Henry Kissinger & Associates), then it makes sense. And in certain professions (legal & accounting come to mind) it's an established practice to use the names of the founders.

However, if you can come up with a good name using another method, I would.

5. Acronym and Lettered Names

Examples: IBM, ABC, FMC

I wouldn't start a business with a name using this approach but many companies have had to migrate to this approach. Maybe they've acquired another company. Or they might have expanded into new markets. Maybe they just diversified their business (e.g. 3M is actually an abbreviation for Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing).

I don't recommend this naming approach to too many. After all, it's not particularly memorable, distinctive or thought provoking. However, I do recommend this approach when most people in the market have already shortened your company name to these initials. Otherwise, take a pass on this alphabet-soup approach.

6. The dreaded "& Associates"

Examples: Too numerous to count

I meet with a lot of folks who are just beginning a new company. They proudly take me through their business idea, and then slide a business card across the table. My heart sinks though when I read *Joe Blow & Associates*. Instead of working hard for a distinctive name, they've instead chosen what I call the "ego-trip method".

I'll probably get a lot of people's noses out of joint by saying this but, naming your company after yourself is limiting. These days "and Associates" typically connotes that you're starting out. And five years from now, even if you have 10 employees, you'll still be communicating "small" to the market.

How to protect your name

Once you've decided on a name, how do you protect its use? There are a number of steps available to protect it, but which ones you take depend on these factors:

- The geographic scope of your business' physical assets
- Whether your Internet site conducts commerce
- Your type of business

If your business is strictly local (e.g. Aldrich Street Cleaners), then you'd want to register the name with the Secretary of State's office in your state. You can usually call up the office and request a cursory search over the phone for the company name you want. Then, you officially register your company name with the Secretary of State's office by filling out a form and submitting a fee (somewhere in the neighborhood of \$40).

I'd also recommend publishing your company name quickly after you get confirmation back from the Secretary of State's office. This helps you gain visibility, but more importantly it establishes a permanent record of "first use" for the name. Immediately after receiving confirmation of my company name, I published an announcement declaring my business' formation in two consecutive issues of a local legal journal.

If your business is a corporation, many states require you to include words such as *corporation*, *company*, *incorporated* or *limited* in your name. Read the fine print closely when filling out the forms from the Secretary of State.

Doing business in other states

If your trading area will include other states, you'll probably want to register your name in them. You can do this by writing the Secretary of State's office in those states and requesting the forms. I'm told you can register in all 50 states through the mail.

Trademarks

A trademark is "any word, name, symbol or device, or any combination thereof used by a person, or which a person has a bona fide intention to use in commerce, to identify and distinguish his or her goods including a unique product from those manufactured or sold by others and to indicate the source of the goods, even if the source is unknown." Trademarks can be registered in individual states or at the federal level through the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)

Why would you seek a trademark?

- If you anticipate expanding into new markets, a trademark affords you protection to do this.
- A trademark can pose one more barrier to entry for your competitors.
- If battling competitors who are importing knock-off versions of your product is an issue, a trademark helps.

Please be advised that the trademark laws are complex, so if you're thinking of a trademark, consult with a trademark lawyer.

Logo; your company's symbol

A logo is a distinctive symbol that helps identify a company. The cost to develop a logo can run in the tens of thousands of dollars, or it can be free. For

another business venture of mine, I discovered a free-use icon in a book of images. With some cutting and pasting, I developed it into a company logo.

If you're serious about a logo though, I recommend hiring a good design firm. The right logo goes a long way towards crafting an image for your company.

Here are some guidelines to follow when developing a logo:

- It should easily communicate and not confuse.
- It should synch up with your positioning.
- It should be distinctive.
- It should be an enduring image—one that will last for years.

Once you've developed several concepts, I'd test each in color and black and white. I'd test them in a variety of sizes. I'd test them in a variety of locations on your materials. Once you select a logo that's effective and has withstood all these tests, you'll now possess a real marketing asset.

Taglines: A memorable definition

I'm a big believer in taglines. In 10 words or less a good tagline can plant in a prospect's mind, the core essence of a brand. And for smaller companies, it can be one of the most efficient marketing weapons in their arsenal.

A tagline is simply a short description of a business' reason for being. It can incorporate elements of its expertise, it's target audience, even the markets it serves. Taglines can be both direct and subtle—whatever it takes to get the prospect to say to themselves “Oh, I get it.”

How can you develop a tagline for your business? There's a real art to it, but here's an exercise that can generate a working tagline:

Fill in the blanks to these questions:

- Our expertise is in _____.
(which field).
- What we offer our customers are _____. (your products or product category).
- We appeal best to _____. (your target audience).

Now take your answers to these 3 questions and insert them into this sentence:

XYZ Company—_____ for _____.

So, let's say your answers were:

- 1) Payroll
- 2) Software products and
- 3) Time starved HR professionals

Then, your working tagline using this model would be:

XYZ Company—Payroll Software Products for Time Starved Professionals.

At this stage, I recommend taking take this working tagline to a copywriter or marketing consultant. In a hour or two (if they're any good) they can make this tagline a bit more 'zingy'. What you're after is a memorable and pithy tagline, and they can help you get there.

Attach it to your logo

Once you have a tagline, always connect it to your logo as a standard practice. Either place the tagline below your logo or alongside it. But, whenever your logo appears, your tagline should be with it. This further define your image and gives the prospect two different ways to experience your company—through pictures and words.

Some people process information better graphically; others like words. Linking your logo & tagline improves the clarity of your marketing communications—making your brand clear as a bell.

Fonts and tpestyles

Along with names, logos and taglines, fonts and tpestyles help define your brand. Have your creative designer standardize your fonts so that you use one or two as company standards. Make sure they are easy to read and convey the image you want.

More importantly though, make sure these are readily available fonts. I once had a designer develop a brand using a font that was extremely difficult to find. So, when it came time to develop printed materials using this hard-to-find

font, the printer didn't have it. We had to shell out additional money to purchase it for the printer (and ourselves).

Colors: The mood for your visual identity

How do you feel when you walk into a yellow room? When you see a sign with a red background color, what's your first reaction? If you see someone dressed all in black, what's the first thought in your mind? Colors generate emotional reactions, and it's important to carry that over into your branding program.

So, here is a quick list of common colors and the emotions behind them:

<u>Color</u>	<u>Emotions behind the color</u>
Red	Stop, energy, passion
Yellow	Caution, cowardice
Green	Go, safe, sexual arousal
White	Purity, virtue
Black	Luxury, prestige, evil
Blue	Authority, calm, masculinity
Orange	Strength, stimulation
Brown	Warmth, comfort
Purple	Royalty

Just as important is knowing which colors your competitors use—and avoiding them. If you're trying to distinguish your brand from the competitors, you'll shoot yourself in the foot by choosing your competitor's color.

Get copies of color brochures or logos from all your competitors & see which colors they've staked out. Then, differentiate yourself through a color.

If your company has an international presence, you'll want to know what stigmas are attached to your company color in the host country. For example, China views red as the most appealing color. Blue however, a very popular brand color in the U.S., is perceived in China as evil or sinister. If your company has international offices, consider how your color plays in these countries.

Up close and far away

The number one mistake I see companies make in designing a logo is not considering its range of uses. I can just see the marketing team picking the winning logo winner in an aseptic conference room, under artificial light, looking at a sample that's about 6 inches square. What they fail to realize though is that that same logo must appear in outdoor signage measuring 5 square feet and on its website measuring only 1-inch square.

Consider all the ways your logo will be used—big and small. I once enlarged a client's logo from 4 square inches to 5 square feet and mounted it to the outside of a building. I then drove by the building at 60 miles per hour to test how visible the logo would be. The reason? The company was going to begin advertising on billboards, and I wanted to make sure the logo registered well with the drive-by audience.

Fax it to yourself

If you'll use your new logo on a fax cover sheet, try faxing the logo to yourself as a test. I've received faxes from businesses that looked like they had a huge inkblot in the corner. I later found out that this inkblot was their award-winning logo that doesn't fax worth a darn.

Publish some guidelines

I'm not talking corporate manuals here. But I do believe in recording the standards for your brand. This document should cover:

- Sizes
- Colors
- Fonts & tpestyles
- Locations or placements

It could just be a 3-ring binder with examples of how you want your logo/etc. to appear. This is a great resource for all internal staff and also could help when it comes time for training.

Don't forget about the sounds of your brand

When you consider brand elements, don't forget the sounds of your brand. Background music. On-hold messaging. These branding elements appeal to our ears, yet sometimes they don't.

There's a cool coffee bar near my office. Funky décor, great atmosphere, it's almost perfect, except for the music. I'd best describe it as rap-grunge with an extreme edge. You can tell the "20-something" wait staff likes it, but they aren't customers—they *have* to come back tomorrow. What about the rest of us who can take our business to five other coffee bars in a 6-block radius?

Another company I call on the phone plays rap over its on-hold system. I don't know about you, but I believe there's more to music than 3 bad chords and rotten lyrics. I hate being on hold with that company! And their relationship with me suffers ever so slightly each time I call.

Branding element checklists

Here's a checklist of some of the more common branding elements a company uses:

- Company name
- Taglines
- Division & subsidiary names
- Product & service names
- Trademarks
- Fonts & typestyles
- Logos
- Color Schemes

Branding vehicles checklist

And here is a checklist of some of the more common vehicles a company uses in its branding efforts:

- Business cards & letterhead
- Envelopes
- Premiums
- Annual reports
- Promotional brochures & flyers
- Advertisements
- Packaging
- All company signage including directional signs (“All Deliveries this way...”)
- Storefronts
- Reception area signage
- Conference & board rooms
- Websites
- Business vehicles
- Uniforms
- Trade show booths & banners
- Your building’s exterior appearance
- On-hold music
- Store background music

Remember...

In the end, hold your branding efforts to the highest standard possible. Keep it of the highest quality you can afford and consistent across all mediums. Your customers (both current and new) will thank you for it.

Jay Lipe is the president of Emerge Marketing, a marketing firm that offers *Fortune 500 marketing expertise to growing companies*. He has consulted with over 60 companies & organizations including consumer & industrial manufacturers, service companies, non-profit organizations, universities, and municipalities. For more information, please see www.emergemarketing.com/services

In addition to his consulting practice, Lipe is a speaker and seminar leader on a variety time-tested marketing strategies that boost sales & profits. For more information, please visit www.emergemarketing.com/speeches

Lipe also offers a variety of books, workbooks, special reports and free downloads from his company's website. For more information please visit www.emergemarketing.com/publications.